AGAIN ABOUT POLYBIUS, XXXVI, 9, 3–17*

BY

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In his well-known study on the limits of Hellenization, Arnaldo Momigliano noticed the fact that, for Polybius, the political attitude and actions of Rome (which always had clearly defined reasons and sufficient justifications) [1] were the result of the decisions of a compact socio-political group whose homogeneity was made evident by the absence of internal conflicts and by the control easily exerted on the lower classes and on the allies; it was mostly made evident by the realism of the final purpose of the Roman policy — universal domination.

The postulates of the Polybean conception about Rome were, accordingly, internal harmony of the senatorial order and social stability, on the one hand, and the Roman balance between city and allies, on the other[2]. A. Momigliano's demonstration is based on the « Polybean silence »: that is, mainly, the absence from the text of any narrations which could affect the thesis of the homogeneity of the senatorial order or reveal eventual conflicts between Rome and the allies. Thus, neither the tension between Cato and Flamininus [3], nor that between the former and the two Scipions [4], nor the 44 accusations raised against Cato [5] are mentioned, even if Cato's frequent attacks against the Greeks and even against Polybius himself, are retained [6].

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* I should like to express my gratitude to Dr. Zoe Petre, for suggesting me the idea of this investigation, for the goodwill she had to read the manuscript and to give me many valuable suggestions. The author of these lines has been much influenced by A. Momigliano's study, *Sagesses barbares. Les limites de l'hellénisation*, Paris, 1979 (we could not use the original English version, *Alien Wisdom: the Limits of Hellenization*, Cambridge, 1975) as well as by P. Vidal-Naquet's studies on the position of the historian between two worlds — *Il buon uso del tradimento*, Roma, 1980 and *Flavius Arrien entre deux mondes*, postface to Arrien, *Histoire d'Alexandre*, Paris, 1984.

[1] F. W. Walbank (*Polybius and Rome's Eastern Policy*, JRS, 53, 1963, p. 1–13) discusses the Polybean vision on the relationship between the Roman spirit of universal domination and the constant un-Roman responsibility of the conflicts in which Rome was involved. More recently, P. S. Derow (*Polybius, Rome and the East*, JRS, 69, 1979, p. 1–15) has underlined Polybius' changed attitude after the narration of the Second Punic War, Rome's policy being that of awaiting the pretext (p. 14). See also the discussion on what is and what is not *bellum iustum* for Polybius and not only for him — E. Gabba, *Aspetti culturali dell'imperialismo romano*, Athenaeum, 55, 1974, p. 73.

[2] A. Momigliano, *Sagesses barbares* ..., p. 39.

[3] Plu., *Cat. Ma.*, 17,1; 19,2.

[4] Plu., *Cat. Ma.*, 3, 5–6,; Corn. Nep., *Cato*, 1, 3.

[5] Plin., *N. H.* VII, 100; Plu., *Cat. Ma.*, 15, 4.

[6] XXXI, 25, 5; XXXV, 6; XXVI, 14; XXXIX, 1; see A. Momigliano's comments on all fragments from other ancient authors used here, fragments which prove the existence in Rome of some conflictual states not reminded by Polybius (*Sagesses barbares* ..., p. 39–40).

The Polybean vision about the equilibrium between social classes and political bodies in Rome and about the Roman order firmly imposed on the allies, probably explains why the historian avoided the description of some moments of religious crises such as the Affair of the Bacchanalia or the troubles that occurred during the Second Punic War [7].

Moreover, but even the points of view hostile to the destruction of Carthage, the dispute in the Senate (in 152) or the arguments raised by Scipio Nasica, registered by other sources [8], are not mentioned.

The object of this study is primarily to discuss Polybius' omission of some facts and not the theoretical problems implied by his point of view (such as that of the mixed constitution)[9]. We proceed here from the idea of a certain deliberation in the « Polybean silence » [10].

The passage we examine (XXXVI, 9, 3 —17) is particularly relevant for our investigation. It shows various points of view expressed in Greece in connection with the Third Punic War and the destruction of Carthage [11].

Four attitudes can be distinguished. The first one (9, 3 —4) is in favour of the destruction of Carthage, considered as an evidence of power and as a token of wisdom, the elimination of the perpetual enemy of Rome being a prudent and necessary action.

As a sequel, the second attitude (9, 5 —8) focuses on the old Roman traditions related to the rules of war, out of which the empire itself had been born. The war had to be carried on only until the submission of the enemy. But with the Third Macedonian War, Rome went further and destroyed Perseus' Kingdom. The act committed in 146 does nothing else than continue this new type of political and military actions since the Romans destroyed Carthage after their conditions had been accepted. The Greeks who shared this point of view accuse Rome of tyrannical conduct [12].

Related to this critical attitude towards Roman expansionism is in fact the third point of view adoped by the Greeks in the dispute about the fate of Carthage (9, 9 —11). The war, as it has been waged against Carthage, with all its treacheries, ambushes and night-attacks which no longer corresponded to the old Roman traditions, made the Greek historian examine again, step by step, the whole criticism raised by older senators against Q. Marcius Philippus at the time of the Third Macedonian War [13].

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[7] *ibid.*, p. 53.

[8] D. S., XXXIV, 33,4 ; Plu., *Cat. Ma.*, 27, 1—2 ; App., *Pun.*, 69, 315 ; could we suppose a connection between the fact that this debate was not related and an eventual conflict between Polybius and Scipio Nasica? (A. Momigliano, *Sagesses barbares* ..., p. 39.)

[9] For this, see especially, F. W. Walbank, *Polybios on the Roman Constitution*, C. Q., 37, 1943, p. 73—89.

[10] P. Pédech (*Un grec à la découverte de Rome. L'exil de Polybe (167—150 av. J. C.)*, Orpheus, II, 1964, p. 135) considered that a number of the Polybean elipses in the text are due to the fact that, like the Roman aristocratic circle that had adopted him, the historian was unable to grasp all the growing contradictions in the Roman society.

[11] The passage has been largely discussed by F. W. Walbank, *Political Morality and the Friends of Scipio*, JRS, 55, 1965, mainly p. 8—10.

[12] F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, III, Oxford, 1979, p. 663, underlines the resemblance with Flamininus' arguments after Cynoscephalae (Plb., XVIII, 37, 2 ; 37, 7 ; and the Polybean fragment from D. S., XXIX, 31).

[13] Tit. Liv., XLII, 47, 5—8 ; Walbank, *Commentary* ..., *ad loc.*

The fourth point of view (9, 12—17) is the most extensively dealt with. This might be a proof of Polybius' sympathy with the ideas expressed therein [14]. The discussion focuses around the somehow formal problem of the lawfulness of the destruction of Carthage. The accusations of sacrilege (ἀσέβημα), breach of faith (παρασπόνδημα), or illigitimate act (ἀδίκημα) [15] are one by one turned down as long as the Roman actions entailed neither impious acts against gods, parents or the dead, nor the infringing of any treaty enforced by oath, of any law or custom. On the contrary, the Carthaginians had been those who violated a treaty by attacking Massinissa (Polybius makes no mention of the circumstances of this action). For this group of Greeks, by destroying Carthage Rome did nothing else than to benefit from the rights gained by the unconditional surrender of the conquered city. This point of view, shared by the followers of a firm policy of Rome, probably also constitutes a response given to those who were not opposed to the destruction of Carthage, but only to the manner in which this war had been carried on, considering that such actions could discredit the image of an empire founded on moral principles [16].

The passage discussed here can therefore be considered as bringing into discussion various Greek attitudes towards Rome [17], as a rather theoretical debate of the problems of a state which makes recourse to force to maintain its supremacy. It could also be the narration of a drama which had actually been played in Rome but re-created by Polybius in Greek milieu and with Greek characters.

If need be, an argument could be found againt each of these hypotheses ; one could raise, for instance, the question of the absence from the Polybean text of a « Hellenized form » of Scipio Nasica's theory [18], who based his discourse against the destruction of Carthage on the argument of fatal decay of a power which thus would have no longer to face such rival power. We cannot firmly choose between any of these possibilities but we can suppose that some Roman attitudes were actually adopted in the Greek debates; even if we are not confronted with a rigorous and integral transposition of the Roman discussions (as long as the very arguments of Scipio Nasica are missing), it might be possible that Polybius, who was too near to these debates to ignore them, brought them, even fragmentarily, in the Greek environment.

Such a transfer could be compatible with the general approach of the Megalopolitan who usually analyses the political conduct of the Greeks and of the Carthaginians, of the Oriental or Macedonian dynasts, but never that of Rome, since his critical attitude towards some Roman personalities (seldom manifested), did not mean a critical attitude towards the policy adopted by the city as a whole [19].

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[14] Professor Walbank (*Commentary* ..., III, p. 664) arrives at this conclusion as a result of an elementary statistics, but mainly because it seems hard to belive that Polybius would have condemned a political act to which he had subscribed in Scipio's camp at Carthage.

[15] See the discussion of these terms in Walbank, *Commentary* ..., *ad loc.*

[16] F. W. Walbank's commentary in JRS, 55, 1965, p. 9.

[17] One of the asserted purposes of the Polybean writing is the knowledge of various non-Roman attitudes towards Rome (III, 4, 6—7 ; Walbank, *Commentary* ..., *ad loc*).

[18] For instance, Plu., *Cat. Ma.*, 27.

[19] A. Momigliano, *Sagesses barbares* ..., p. 42.

Things are not much different in the fragment we discuss. Polybius' position can be hardly assessed, but the extended narration of the two critical arguments against Roman expansionism, at the very time when Rome was looking for a system which could morally justify its authority[20], seems to us a particularly relevant fact.

But could the passage from book XXXVI represent, under this disguised form, a moment when the « Polybean silence » was broken?

Polybius' deep involvement in the political acts of Rome at the middle of the 2nd century, could not remain without consequences on his historical work [21]. Being so near to these facts, the historian could not ignore the signs of the disfunctionalities and the antagonistic realities of the Roman world, no matter whether we refer to internal conflicts in the senatorial order or to the tension between Senate and the rest of the citizens, between Senate and the allies, and so on. But Polybius writes so that his thoughts can be read only between the lines and therefore such a way of reading is necessary however dominant would be the illusion of the objectivity of the Polybean *Histories* — or of any other *Histories*, as well.

This disfunctionalities of the Roman world are noticeable in the Polybean text only at the moment when the author is in a greater measure implicated in the policy of Rome, at Scipio's camp in Carthage, or as a Roman mediator, in Achaia.

The arguments debated in passage XXXVI, 9, 3—17, may equally represent a synthesis of the divergent points of view prevailing at that epoch, expressed by many, perhaps by Polybius himself, and the transfer to Greece, the natural site of all discords and disputes[22], of the confrontations of opinions that in some cases could have been expressed, even in Rome. The opposition between Greeks and Romans, in Polybean visions, is equivalent to and corroborated by the opposition between anarchy and order.

The transposing of the disputes from Rome into a disunited Greece, as well as the « Polybean sillence », constitutes a method for saving the Polybean political ideal — Roman stability [23].

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[20] See the problem raised by Panaetius' very elaborate theory, a philosopher who was also in close relation with Scipio Aemilianus (Cic., *Rep.*, I, 34), his moral arguments for justifying Roman expansionism (W. Capelle, *Griechische Etnik und römischer Imperialismus*, Klio, 25, 1932, p. 86—113), and the eventual apocryphal character of this theory (A. Momigliano, *Sagesses barbares* . . . p. 44—45). See also the problem of the philosophers' mission and the discourse held by Carneades in 155. Polybius was present at this discourse (Gell., VI, 14, 10) but he did not disclose this in the *Histories*, although it had made a great sensation at that time.

[21] F. W. Walbank, *Polybius between Greece and Rome*, in *Polybe, Entretiens Hardt*, XX, Vandœvres—Genève, 1974, p. 13; discusses the evolution of the attitude of the Greek historian towards his Roman protectors, during the writing of the *Histories*.

[22] K. S. Sacks, *Polybius' other view of Aetolia*, JRS, 95, 1975, p. 92—106; Polybius' vision on the relationship between the unity of the Roman world and the disunited conglomerate of the Greek world is discussed in the context of his attitude towards the Aetolian Ligue and the wars of the Greek world in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B. C. Greece is, for Polybius, rather the victim of its disunification than the victim of Flamininus.

[23] Considering the Hellenocentric point of view of the Roman expansion, unshared by other Greek interpretations of Roman imperialism, such as that of Posidonius (A. D. Nock, *Posidonius*, JRS, 49, 1959, p. 1—15 an mainly H. Strasburger, *Poseidonios on Problems of the Roman Empire*, JRS, 55, 1965, p. 40—53).

We may say therefore that Polybius was not the creator of a theory meant to justify Roman imperialism, as perhaps Panaetius was, the political pragmatism and the clear-sightedness of Lycortas' son may well operate as an equivalent of a major debate about the moral arguments of Roman expansion.

But Polybius was in fact an exponent of the Greek aristocracy, more exactly, of the part of the Greek aristocracy who accepted the Roman order as long as it brought social stability.

« Polybius remained primarily an Achaean » who attempted to give to Greeks and Romans a lesson of co-existence (in Latin terms). The Mithridatic Wars were to prove that the lesson has not been learned [24].

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[24] Walbank, *Entretiens Hardt*, XX, p. 29—31.